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The New Plagiarism and a Heideggerian Foray into Fear

About a month ago, I ran into my friend sitting outside of the library on his computer. He told me he was working on an essay for a class, whose teacher he clearly hadn't much respect for, since he told me, in not quite these words, "the last essay I wrote, I really poured my heart out into, and I likewise believed *wholeheartedly* that it would receive a good grade. When I got my paper back, I was shocked, and then saddened," and this, I suppose, is where he began to lose respect for, and likewise faith in, his teacher, "for, in addition to receiving a bad grade, my teacher's feedback didn't tell me *what* was wrong with my thesis, it just told me it *was* wrong. She didn't criticize it for being too weak of a claim, or one which was irrelevant to the topic of the class, she said it was wrong because she *thought* it was, outright."

What I would have said in that moment had I learned I was being used as a character in an academic essay, is, "You mean to say she hadn't read the preface¹ to William James' *The Will to Believe?*, wherein he writes words which underlie and justify--and which would serve as a reasonable disclaimer to--any teaching a teacher could purport to teach:

'I have preached the right of the individual to indulge his personal faith at his personal risk. I have discussed the kinds of risk; I have contended that none of us escape all of them; and I have only pleaded that it is better to face them open-eyed than to act as if we did not know them to be there.' (xi preface).

It is only fitting that these words come from James' preface to his own beliefs, his own teachings, voiced in his *Will to Believe*; and if one accepts the premise that 'none of us escape all

¹ From the 1912 edition of *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, published by Longmans, Green, and Co. The online link to which is this: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/26659/26659-h/26659-h.htm>

of [the risks associated with holding] them [,beliefs, that is]’, then it follows that we ought to face the ones we can’t escape ‘open-eyed’, not ‘act[ing] as if we did not know them to be there’. When your teacher gave you a bad grade simply because she refused to see your viewpoint as valid--not *as* an argument, but as *worth* arguing--she closed her eyes to your entire essay, which explains why you didn’t get any critical or technical feedback.”

“But isn’t it her job to provide such feedback? I read² on UCSB’s Program Learning Outcomes page³ that one of the ‘5 core educational values: connecting teaching & research’, is one wherein ‘students will experience a comprehensive liberal arts education via full participation in a leading research institution’. If my ‘participation in a leading research institution’ is predicated on my experience of ‘learning as discovery’⁴--in which I am able to ‘explore knowledge fields in ways that stimulate independent thought, critical reasoning, and creativity’ as a part of, and alongside, ‘a community of faculty and staff in a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration’⁵--then either my thesis wasn’t explorative enough, or, precisely because it was explorative, it could be considered ‘knowledge that advances well-being in our state, our nation, and the world’⁶, whose value furthermore, can be seen as my key to enter ‘participation in a leading research institution’, by opening to me the door of the very ‘community of faculty and staff’ my teacher is herself part of. Thus, the bad grade can be seen--in one sense--as the withholding of a key from me by my professor (for which ‘reason’ we will come upon shortly); a key, mind you, that was promised to me by the palace of education that professor happens to be employed at, and *by*. What ‘reason’ could my professor possibly have for withholding this key from me? That by giving me the key to her intellectual community,

² To further develop my argument and the issue at stake I am taking the creative liberty at this point to embellish this encounter through fictionalization

³ A link to which can be found here: <https://www.assessment.ucsb.edu/learning-outcomes>

⁴ Project Learning Outcome (PLO) #2

⁵ PLO #3

⁶ Along the lines of PLO #4

by placing me *alongside* herself in the intellectual arena, I might defeat her in battle.” “No!”

“Yes! What else could explain this kind of behavior? If it is the opposite of the kind of behavior promised to you by her employer, what else but the fear that it would jeopardize that very employment relationship--by destroying the grounds for it, once your argument has been admitted into the community and shown to disprove, and hence, defeat, her own--could have led her to it?” “I’m not sure. The whole thing doesn’t make sense.” “Exactly! Her behavior is fundamentally irrational. One: in that it goes against the kind of behavior she is supposed to have given her contract with, and as an employee of, the university. Two: because, at least right now, you *don’t* pose a threat to your professor’s position in the academic arena. Your essay might be the seed of a monster of a work that, if unleashed within the academic arena, could tear her work to shreds. But, even if we suppose there were such a work, yours is just the seed of it. Which, to become a living, breathing, monster, would need to be raised and cared for by, and ‘in[,] a community of faculty and staff[,] in a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration’, equipped likewise with a *language* of research, gained through ‘participation in a leading research institution’, wherein the very rules for battle in the intellectual arena are written. Perhaps, if we dropped the seedling that is your essay into the arena *with* your professor, there is the possibility that another academic monster, perhaps her rival, could see your seed, pick it up, eat it, and in doing so, digest the vital argumentative nutrients necessary to level a mortal blow to your professor and her place in the arena. But the likelihood of these things happening is next to nil. In reality, by giving you the key to the arena; that is, by considering your opinion, your professor could in fact realize that the seed of your essay is something they themselves have been hungering for. Or, they could realize in it the risk they wouldn’t have otherwise foreseen in the work of their adversary and use it to protect themselves against their future onslaughts. Either way, it seems like

there is no reason for them not to give you the key of entrance into the intellectual arena by *acknowledging your viewpoint as valid.*” “Are you sure we both haven’t made some mistake, and that my viewpoint really isn’t valid?” “I’d like to say, ‘we’ll have to leave that up to the professors to decide’, but you’ve already done that. Something that could be worth trying is showing it to a different professor, since, after all--and although it seems as if yours might not want this to be the case--you are paying tuition to be a part of ‘a [supposed] community of faculty and staff [engaged] in a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration’.”

Fast forward two months and my friend has a new story for me, one which leads me to think that there must be some kind of logic operative behind the seemingly inexplicable intolerance his teacher displayed toward the thesis of his previous paper: after writing an essay whose message he had wholly divested himself, and his heart, from, whose contents he cared about only in terms of the accuracy of their mirrorings of the mental workings of his teacher, as they had been expressed over the course of the course, he got an A.

What followed from an essay which followed, or one could say, flowed, from my friend’s heart, was a bad grade. On the other hand, what followed from his attempt to mimic the motions of his teacher’s ‘teachings’, presenting them back to their teacher, what followed was a good grade. To paint a psychological picture of the kind of lesson it feels like this teacher is trying to impart to us as students, I would like to offer a parody on some words of encouragement the American philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, writes to the aspiring poet. Emerson says, “Doubt not, O poet, but persist. Say ‘It is in me, and shall out.’”⁷ What it sounds like my friend’s teacher is saying when they ‘taught’ the way they did is, “Doubt on, O student, and desist. Say ‘It is in *you*, and shall soon be in me””. Faced with this kind of ‘teaching’ in the classroom, which is anything *but* encouraging, a false dichotomy begins to take hold in the mind of a student,

⁷ “The Poet”. Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*; Modern Library Classics.

exemplified by a summary of what my friend told me he felt about the whole situation: “either I care about what I write and get a bad grade, *or* I sacrifice my desire to write something I care about and *manufacture* something to get a good grade”. The fear emanating off of this false dichotomy comes to cloud over our thinking and living, at first in the classroom, and then outside of it. But, first and foremost, the fact that my friend was rewarded with a good grade for his second essay, one that will come to shape the GPA the university will advertise him as having attained himself, shows that the university has contradicted its own goals as they are laid out in the the undergraduate project learning outcomes.

Not only have they failed to create a “community of collaboration” that fosters students’ “independent thought, critical reasoning, and creativity”, a crucial part of the learning and education necessary for “participation in a leading research institution” whose aim is to create “knowledge that advances well-being in our state, our nation, and the world”, but they have in fact violated their own integrity policy. That is, when my friend’s teacher denied his argument as valid, she seemed to be communicating the fact that the only one she was willing to accept was her own, repeated back to her. When my friend tested this hypothesis to see if it was in fact the case, he was proven right. He was given a good grade for “taking credit for ... work created by another person” “without indicating that the information is copied and properly citing the source of the work”⁸. We hear further that

“It is expected that students attending the University of California, Santa Barbara understand and subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity, and are willing to bear individual responsibility for their work. Any submission that fulfills an academic

⁸ Excerpts from the UCSB *Student Conduct Code* on the UCSB Academic Integrity webpage (<https://studentconduct.sa.ucsb.edu/academic-integrity>), under the subheader entitled, Academic Dishonesty.

requirement must represent a student's original work. Any act of academic dishonesty will subject a person to University disciplinary action.”⁹

The more “work created by another person”--that is, his own teacher's ideas--my friend took credit for, “without indicating that the information [was] ... copied and properly citing the source of the work” the better grades he received and the less “willing to bear individual responsibility for [his] ... work” my friend became. It was in fact the idea that “a student's original work [could itself constitute] any act of academic dishonesty[,] ... subject[ing them] ... to University disciplinary action” began to take hold in the mind of my friend when he saw things go the way they did. How could there be such a disparity between the policy of the university and the ongoing in its halls? Could it, perhaps, not be traced to the teacher, but to the student themselves? Was I tricked by my friend? Is the entire paradox I have been establishing the product of my own failed reasoning? Perhaps, but perhaps not. For, when my friend felt like he couldn't give any of himself to his paper--he couldn't put any of *his* thoughts into it--in order to be given, by the university, a good grade, he took himself out of his work. When Emerson writes, “if a man dissemble, deceive, he deceives himself, and goes out of acquaintance with his own being”¹⁰, I feel as if I have not only heard a perfect psychological synopsis of my friend's paradoxical predicament, but that I have been given an explanation for what could be called the new plagiarism. Furthermore, the classroom in which the student who “goes out of acquaintance with his own being” gets rewarded, fosters the false dichotomy which, over time, finds its way into the conference room, the church, the kitchen, the car, the baby carriage, and, ultimately, the casket around which we stand, wondering what would be a fitting epitaph. Someone from the

⁹ Ibid, however, this excerpt comes from the text beneath the subheader entitled, Standards Upheld.

¹⁰ P. 64, “Nature”. Emerson, Ralph Waldo. The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

crowd recommends splicing together some lines from the Talking Heads song, “Once in A Lifetime”:

Here lies John, who frequently found himself “behind the wheel of a large automobile...in a beautiful house...with a beautiful wife...”, and with beautiful children to boot, but never once asked himself, “Well, how did I get here?”

“Wait, wait, wait!”, some others might say. “Isn’t that song criticizing those who don’t ask this question, those who fail to heed the ancient advice of Socrates when he said ‘the unexamined life is not worth living’?” “I know what to write”, someone says, a true diplomat, balancing the interests of all those present at the funeral procession: “‘How did I get here?’ He never asked the question himself, so the least we can do is ask it of ourselves to find out whether or not John took the right tack through life by never asking it of himself.”

Some more instantiation for the view that the words inscribed on John’s epitaph would in fact be fitting on many headstones, comes from another anecdote.

In my senior year of high school, I was on a ski lift, when a voice from the other end began talking to me. I turned to it, and saw it was coming from a fit-looking middle-aged man holding loosely the wrapper of a cliff bar in his hand, the calories from which it appeared, in addition to being put into his skiing, would be put by his body into use in conversing with me.

After a bit of small talk he dropped this on me: “Kid, at a certain point, you’re gonna have to decide whether you wana be like me--working for supermegacorp [his exact wording, and I think it was one, like Oracle] five days a week, selling yourself to them, so you have the cash to spend your two days off, skiing in the mountains--*or* you’re gonna have to live some kind of life where you make them both happen...”. And, here, he kind of trailed off, but I could picture what he was trying to say. Having essentially reiterated the false dichotomy my friend

encountered in the classroom, and John lived his whole life believing in, and spending on one side of, and whereas this guy made his weekends seem like heaven in comparison with weeks that sounded like hell, he was aware of people who embrace the third option: it wasn't "living to work' or 'working to live'", but rather "living to work' and 'working to live'", in such a way that one realizes the love they have for their life in and through their work.

The belief in, an existence of, this third option, when confronted with the world as it is, is instantiated in just as much, if not more, of the classroom experiences my peers and I have had than the kind outlined above. For, the purpose of these anecdotes is not to bemoan the fact that teachers and students sometimes disagree, or hold opposing viewpoints, about a class's subject matter, but rather to understand why and how my friend's teacher responded to the situation as they did. For, we--and I will, rightly or wrongly, take the liberty to speak for my friends and peers, from whom I have heard similar anecdotes--have had teachers, who, when such disagreements occur, in fact lend an interested ear to our side of the issue, an ear that is able to listen beyond the disagreement of immediate viewpoints and evaluate the 'independent thought, critical reasoning, and creativity' in our work. Thus, it is only by, and from, comparison with this kind of teaching--which I believe comes from a rational place, one that *makes sense to me*--that my confusion about, and desire to understand where, the other kind of 'teaching' my friend, my peers, and I myself have all encountered--and felt makes *no sense at all*--arises. ¹¹

¹¹ We will return to this kind of teaching when we taxonomize it, and its opposite, as teachings, respectively, of re-placement, and displacement (a language which derives its inspiration from, and a conceptual understanding in, Rita Felski's hermeneutics of *restoration*, while taking its instantiation in the kind of teaching proposed on p. of 178 Thomas Carlson's *With the World at Heart*. One wherein having courage when faced with "the trouble of heart that learning and thinking entail[,] ... the essential task of the teacher[,] is to learn one thing: to let learn." One could likewise draw a parallel between the 'letting learn' of Carlson à la Heidegger and the "good interpretations" that come of it, which Jeff Kosky, on p. 2 of his essay *The Question of Criticism*, writes, are "the kinds I want to have, are therefore, I would say, revealing responses: revelations of what comes over the writer when she is encountering the work"

One hint in the search to rationalize what seems from my student standpoint *irrational* behavior lies in revisiting the James quote from the beginning of the first anecdote and asking, “what are the ambiguous sounding ‘kinds of risk’ involved not only in ‘indulg[ing one’s own] ... personal faith’, but indulging that of others?” In essence, to answer this question is to examine the lack of examination present in the university, to see what fear of failure to see to begin with has blinded us from seeing at all: to shine some light into the dark and hazy recesses of my friend’s professor’s behavior, in an attempt to find there some rational basis for it, and hence, dispel the ambiguity of my friend’s situation, and those like it.

To being this process, I would like to perform¹² a word swap of a rather lengthy William James passage, wherein he describes what in modern technostartupslang could be called the “market place of ideas”, and in more Nietzschean jargon, likewise, just the plain old “marketplace” where Zarathustra goes to *thrust* his ideas upon the masses, but which, for our present purposes, we will call the classroom:

‘In this age of toleration [PC culture], no scientist [teacher] will ever try actively to interfere with our religious faith [political and/or intellectual belief: theses, in short], provided we enjoy it quietly with our friends and do not make a public nuisance of it in the market-place [classroom]. But it is just on this matter of the market-place [classroom] that I think the utility of such essays as mine may turn. If religious hypotheses [theses] about the universe [society] be in order at all, then the active faiths [authentic caring] of individuals in them [their theses], freely expressing themselves in life [their essays *and* their lives], are the experimental tests by which they are verified, and the only means by which their truth or falsehood can be wrought out. The truest scientific hypothesis [thesis]

¹² Along the lines of UCSB PhD candidate, Luke McCracken’s, method of finding terms in an academic text and swapping them for terms of everyday life to better understand its implications, what’s at stake in it, and its bearing on *our* everyday lives.

is that which, as we say, 'works' best [makes the most sense]; and it can be no otherwise with religious hypotheses [theses]. Religious [educational] history proves that one hypothesis [teaching method] after another has worked ill, has crumbled at contact with a widening knowledge of the world, and has lapsed from the minds of men. Some articles of faith [tricks of the trade of teaching well], however, have maintained themselves through every vicissitude, and possess even more vitality to-day than ever before: it is for the 'science of religions' [science of education] to tell us just which hypotheses [educational approaches] these are. Meanwhile the freest competition of the various faiths [theses] with one another [in the classroom], and their openest application to life by their several champions [the students who espouse them], are the most favorable conditions under which the survival of the fittest [educational progress] can proceed. They ought therefore not to lie hid each under its bushel, indulged-in quietly with friends [or forgotten completely because academic theses aren't typically (beer die) table talk]. They [our theses] ought to live in publicity [for the whole classroom to hear], vying with each other [including with those of our professors]"¹³ (xii preface)

To better understand the fear at the heart of those in the marketplace unwilling to allow the free exchange of ideas, I think it will be useful to bring in another American philosopher, Henry Bugbee. Through whose work, we can understand the forces operative behind the behavior found in the marketplace of ideas--the "community of faculty and staff in a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration"--the classroom is supposed to be by likening the classroom, and the marketplace, both of which are standards for the more general notion, and feeling, of being in society, or a

¹³ *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, 1912.

culture, which tries to till our behavior along *its* lines¹⁴, to nature (a la Emerson), and wilderness (a la Bugbee) and the kind of education that naturally takes place there, as being a model not only for the kind of education which could, I would like to argue, should, take place in the classroom, but one which must, because it is the *only* kind of education wherein learning happens.

¹⁴ For more along *these* lines of thinking see Stanley Cavell's *The Senses of Walden*, pages 25-6 specifically, for a metaphor linking writing and thinking with the act of tilling, connecting to the question in the present work of academic integrity, by leading us to wonder, "who's doing *our* writing, or the tilling of the thoughts, feelings, and expressions we find ourselves most frequently in use of? Us or someone other than us [Heidegger's *das man*, or "the they"]"